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LETTER DATED 7 SEPTEMBER 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit to you a press statement on the current situation in the Ethio-Eritrean conflict issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia on 4 September 1999 (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador

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Annex

Statement issued on 4 September 1999 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ethiopia on the current situation in the Ethio-Eritrean conflict

Ethiopia's commitment to the peaceful resolution of the conflict that has been imposed on it by Eritrea is well known. From the beginning Ethiopia has called for Eritrea to withdraw its troops from territories it occupied by force and to resolve the border issue peacefully, while reserving her prerogative to exercise her right to self defence.

It is also well known that, not only did Eritrea ignite the war by launching its aggression in May 1998, but in rejecting the proposals of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) over the months, the Eritrean regime bears full responsibility for the perpetuation of the conflict and the thousands of casualties - those killed, maimed or displaced on both sides by the war.

Even now as they profess their support for a peaceful settlement, Eritrea's leaders remain set on the path of war and continue to fan the flames of conflict. What are mentioned here are highlights illustrating their aggressive posture:

- In launching attacks on Ethiopian positions on the Zalambessa front as recently as 1 and 2 September, they have made it clear that the Eritrean Government is far from being prepared for peace and that their professed acceptance of the OAU peace plan goes no further than being a public relations exercise;

- They have recently issued a statement that can only be interpreted as a call to arms;

- They have embarked on a new round of military conscription, press-ganging children and persons above the age of 60 to join the armed forces;

- They have intensified their proxy war against Ethiopia through Somalia by launching terrorist groups, such as the OLF and the Al Ittihad, a movement linked to terrorists of international notoriety;

- Their fanning of conflict, anarchy and lawlessness in Somalia, in addition to targeting Ethiopia, is prolonging the agony of the Somalis who seek national reconciliation, and is even bringing the conflagration to the Kenyan borderlands;

- They seek to destabilize Djibouti by planting mines and promoting insecurity along the northern borders of Djibouti;

- In the areas they have occupied by force in Ethiopia, they have begun to dismantle settlements and towns such as Zalambessa;

- In the occupied areas, they have expelled Ethiopian residents in an attempt to transform the Ethiopian identity of the territories and to rid the localities of all who can bear witness against Eritrea.

All in all, the multi-pronged aggressive behaviour of the Eritrean terrorist regime leaves no doubt that it is not serious about peace, and therefore cannot be trusted to implement an agreement that is designed to bring lasting peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea. It cannot be forgotten that, not only did Eritrea start the war, but by refusing to accept the OAU peace formula, it caused the deaths of thousands of Ethiopians and Eritreans over the past year. If what Eritrea is saying today is to be believed, it could have said the same 16 months ago and avoided the loss of thousands of lives.

For its part, Ethiopia has been committed to a genuine and lasting peaceful resolution of the dispute from the very beginning. It accepted the Framework Agreement, and the Modalities for its implementation recognizing that the documents reflected the principles that Ethiopia, too, shared.

Regarding the proposed "Technical Arrangements", Ethiopia realized that the proposals not only contained matters related to technical implementation, but fundamental issues that showed inconsistency with the Framework Agreement and its Modalities.

Ethiopia considered that the cardinal principle which the peace process needed to uphold - that aggression cannot be rewarded - was dealt with in an unsatisfactory manner in the provisions of the "Technical Arrangements" relating to the restoration of the status quo ante. This is why Ethiopia, among other things, sought clarifications from the OAU.

The "Technical Arrangements" also contained new provisions not found in the Framework Agreement and Modalities, related to a peacekeeping mission and matters involving sovereignty and governance in the areas of redeployment that indicated that the return to the status quo ante was not fully assured.

The withdrawal of Eritrean troops from areas they have occupied by force and the return of the territories fully to their former administration is a matter of fundamental principle for Ethiopia and the OAU. It is imperative that the "Technical Arrangements" comply fully with this requirement. In general, while the clarifications provided by the OAU have been helpful, Ethiopia needs to be certain that its territories taken by force are restored. It cannot compromise its vital interests for the sake of appearing to stand for peace. The Government of Ethiopia has made a commitment to its people that it will not allow aggression to stand. The promise must be kept. This requires the Ethiopian Government to insist on the removal of all loopholes that might impede the full restoration of the status quo ante.

It is in this spirit that the dialogue with the OAU continues. Ethiopia hopes that, through the continued consultations, an acceptable arrangement can be worked out.

Ethiopia's commitment to peace cannot change. Ethiopia seeks nothing more than the restoration of its sovereignty. The Eritrean regime, on the other

hand, continues its subterfuge. While declaring its support for peace, it persists and even intensifies its aggressive activities along the border and in the subregion. The international community cannot be blind to this. Clearly Ethiopia cannot afford to look the other way when its vital interests are at stake.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
4 September 1999